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ABSTRACT

This Digest suggests ways in which film and video media can be effectively integrated into a social studies curriculum. It outlines John E. O'Connor's "Three Types of Questions" and "Four Frameworks for Historical Inquiry," offering examples of how they might be utilized to present video media in a social studies context. The three questions deal with content, production, and reception. The four frameworks focus on: (1) "The Moving Image as Representation of History"; (2) "The Moving Image as Evidence for Social and Cultural History"; (3) "Actuality Footage as Evidence for Historical Fact"; and (4) "The History of the Moving Image as Industry and Art Form." The Digest gives a substantial listing of recently published resources as well as various Internet resources available. (KCM)

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Integrating Film And Television into Social Studies Instruction

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By their own accounts and those of their critics, the current generation of students is a video generation. They learned to read with Big Bird on *Sesame Street* and their view of the world has been largely formed and shaped through visual culture. This familiarity can make film and video a powerful pedagogical tool. Visual media also address different learning modalities, making material more accessible to visual and aural learners. Add to this the rich array of diverse videos and documentaries available and it's easy to see why these formats represent the second most popular source used in social studies classes.

However, the very qualities that make film and video so popular present problems as well. For students raised on a steady diet of media consumption, film and documentary footage used in the classroom often becomes "edutainment." This does more than simply distort historical and social issues. It reinforces the passive viewing and unquestioning acceptance of received material that accompanies growing up in a video environment.

That passivity and lack of critical awareness is anathema to a democracy. An essential aspect of social studies education is the teaching of information and skills needed by people who are to participate actively as citizens in a democratic society. Thirty years ago this meant teaching students to read the newspaper critically, to identify bias there, and to distinguish between factual reporting and editorializing. Critical viewing skills must be added to this effort. One solution to the omnipotence of visual culture is to develop a critical awareness of that culture.

The last ten years have witnessed many efforts combining media literacy and pedagogy. For social studies teachers, an excellent starting point is John E. O'Connor's *Image as Artifact: The Historical Analysis of Film and Television*. O'Connor's work discusses pedagogical approaches to film and video that have their antecedents in the philosophy of historical and social studies inquiry. He defines three basic types of questions that historians ask of any document and applies these to film and video. This is followed by an explication of four frameworks for historical inquiry concerning visual material. These approaches and techniques are neither sequential nor separate; rather they are complementary, designed to be combined and applied throughout the learning process.

Three Types of Questions. (1) Questions about Content. How is the information determined by the visual and aural mechanics of the film? This requires a basic knowledge of the language of film and narrative structure. Teachers should be familiar with editing techniques, camera angles, the uses of sound, and other aspects of the presentation. Similarly, they need some knowledge of film structure. Any number of introductory texts on film production can provide this. A good example is *The Art of Watching Films* (1996) by Joseph M. Boggs.

(2) Questions about Production. Beyond the cultural and social aspects of the film, what influences were at work in shaping the document? How might the background (personal, political, professional) of the producer, director, writer, actors, have influenced the presentation? Interviews, trade magazines, and the national press provide good coverage for recent productions. Press kits and promotional materials are also an excellent, albeit biased, primary source. For older films, memoirs and biographies often provide insight.

(3) Questions about Reception. How was the document received at the time of its production? What factors influenced this reception? Has the critical reception changed over the years? Did this production influence other works? social movements? trends? This approach lends itself well to student projects researching historical reviews and other related stories. Journals and magazines covering mass media history are a particularly rich source.

Four Frameworks for Historical Inquiry. (1) The Moving Image as Representation of History. This approach is often useful simply for acquainting students with a sense of time, place, and material culture. The judicious use of clips from one or several films can introduce students to such issues as living conditions, family relations, social customs, and commerce. For instance, a recent exhibit at the National Institute of Medicine showed scenes from Kenneth Branagh's *Frankenstein* to illustrate early medical practices. Recent studies reveal that many teachers use video clips in this or similar fashions.

(2) The Moving Image as Evidence for Social and Cultural History. This approach represents a virtual gold mine for social studies and history teachers. Popular culture often reflects the social and cultural environment of its times more accurately than it reveals its subject. Laurence Oliver's *Henry V* (1945), made in England during the dark days of World War II, was a stirring paean to patriotism. Later versions stressed the horrors of war. Films involving national and folk heroes, in particular, often act as ritual myths illuminating contemporary conflicts as they reenact a familiar story. The classic American conflict between Wyatt Earp, the Clanton gang, and Doc Holliday has been told as a mythic western, *My Darling Clementine* (1946), a psychological drama, *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (1957), and a revisionist put-down, *Doc* (1971). While film can serve as an engaging introduction to a subject, students should be aware of the constant shading and biases, why these occur, and what they accomplish. Filmmakers involved in recent biographies of George Wallace and Larry Flynt admitted to seriously sanitizing their subjects to fit narrative formats and audience expectations.

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(3) Actuality Footage as Evidence for Historical Fact. A filmed record appears indisputable. Indeed, our very language supports this notion with phrases such as "seeing is believing" and "with your own two eyes." This suggests that footage of a real-life event possess an unvarnished veracity. Documentary footage, however, is never wholly objective. An examination of filming and editing, circumstances surrounding production and distribution, and the producer's intentions are essential for studying such material. Students should be aware that much early newsreel footage was faked. Indeed, this questionable practice continues today. Another essential question to ask: what was left out of the documentary?

(4) The History of the Moving Image as Industry and Art Form. The history and development of modern culture is inextricably intertwined with the growth of industry. In the twentieth century the growth of the communication and entertainment industries has been both progenitor and reflector of social change. Individual films can be treated as emblematic of changes within that industry. Broader topics could include: changes in distribution, financing, and ownership. For example, how is the current situation among independent filmmakers similiar or different than the early days of movie making?

Locating Materials. A wealth of material is available at libraries and video stores. Fortunately there is a corresponding boom in books providing lists, categories, and annotations on this material. Here are a few that should prove useful: *Picture This!: A Guide to over 300 Environmentally, Socially, and Politically Relevant Films and Videos* by Sky Hiatt, Chicago, Noble Press (1992); *Films by Genre: 775 Categories, Styles, Trends, and Movements Defined with a Filmography for Each* by Daniel Lopez, McFarland and Co. (1993); *Hollywood and American History: A Filmography of Over 250 Motion Pictures Depicting U.S. History* by Michael R. Pitts, McFarland and Co. (1984); *Facets African-American Video Guide* by Patrick Ogle, Facets Multimedia, Inc.(1994). Teachers interested in further inquiry and useful background information should check out *Bio-Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* by George F. Custen, Rutgers University Press (1992) and *History by Hollywood: The Use and Abuse of the American Past* by Robert Brent Toplin, University of Illinois Press (1996). Two different perspectives are provided by George Macdonald Frasier's lively and caustic *The Hollywood History of the World: From One Million Years B.C. to Apocalypse Now* published by Beech Tree Books, (1988), and the exhibition catalog *Hollywood and History: Costume Design in Film* organized by Edward Maeder, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (1987).

Educators interested in posting historical questions concerning the production and distribution of films and the industry can subscribe to the Film History listserv. To subscribe, send the message SUBSCRIBE H-FILM Firstname Surname, Affiliation (for example, SUBSCRIBE H-FILM Matthew Paris, Indiana University) to LISTSERV@msu.edu.

Net surfers may want to look at "Screening the Past: An International Electronic Journal of Visual Media and History" at http://www.latrobe.edu.au/www/screeningthepast and "Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies" at http://h-net2.msu.edu/~filmhis/. More information on media literacy can be acquired through the Center for Media Literacy in Los Angeles, California, telephone: 213-931-4177; FAX: 213-931-4474; World Wide Web: http://www.medialit.org/.

References and ERIC Resources. The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from commercial reprint services.

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